

that we need to do more, but to just say the Senate should not act on this suggestion, this is a modest first step. It is not a suggestion for comprehensive reform at this time. We need more information. We need to do more work to decide on the details of a comprehensive, workable policy than is on the books now and administered by our Commerce Department.

So, but for the provisions of the amendment offered by the Senator that I have suggested caused me some concern, I would like to be able to support the amendment so that we could then go on and vote to approve the amendment as amended, but I cannot do that at this point. I hope the Senate will not agree to the amendment.

I know under the announcement that was made earlier today on behalf of the majority leader, there will be no votes on amendments today. They will be set aside and we will come to them later. So there will not be a vote today. Knowing that there will not be, I will not push the issue any further, except to suggest to the Senate that this is an issue that ought to be debated, considered carefully, and we ought to vote for this amendment that I have offered with the cosponsorship of Senator DURBIN.

Incidentally, I asked the other day, after we had described the amendment, that Senator ABRAHAM be added as a cosponsor. I have now been asked to seek unanimous consent that Senator LUGAR be added as a cosponsor. I make that request at this time, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Janice Nielsen, a legislative fellow with Senator CRAIG's office, be granted floor privileges during debate on S. 936, the Defense Authorization Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I want to say I appreciate the remarks of my colleague from Mississippi, Senator COCHRAN. We hope to be able to work with him over the weekend and hope to come to an agreement and compromise with him by next week. Like he said, hopefully we can vote on this at that time.

I yield the floor.

Mr. THURMOND. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we may move from this quorum call into morning business for 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to calling off the quorum?

Mr. LEVIN. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The clerk will continue to call the roll.

The bill clerk continued the call of the roll.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, making two separate requests, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRIST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I can proceed for 20 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Will the Senator yield for a unanimous-consent request?

Mr. LEVIN. Reserving the right to object, would the Senator add to that, that following morning business that we go back into an automatic quorum call?

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following my speech, if it ever begins, that we go back into the quorum call, and I also ask unanimous consent that, without losing the floor, I might yield to Senator INHOFE so that he might get a staff member on the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR—S. 936

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Jeff Severs be given floor privileges for the DOD bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, with all this folderol, I hope they are not conspiring against me or against Texas. If so, maybe we are in trouble.

SAVING MEDICARE

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about a very difficult subject that for the next couple years is going to be very unpopular. In the long history of the country it is one of the most important subjects that we have ever debated—and that is trying to save Medicare.

I want to talk about what we did in the Finance Committee. We reported a bill that will be on the floor by the middle of next week. I want to explain to people exactly what we did and exactly why we did it. I want to talk about why it is important to the future of the country and why it is critically important to 38 million people who depend on Medicare. It is something that we have to do, and it was a courageous action taken by the committee. However, it will be a great blot on the courage and leadership of this Congress if we let this effort, started in the Finance Committee this week, die on the floor of the U.S. Senate or in the Congress.

First of all, Mr. President, let me remind people that we have a terrible problem in Medicare. Medicare will be insolvent in 3 years. There are a lot of things I may do in my political career that I do not want to do, but there is

one thing I am never going to do. I am never going to call up my 83-year-old mother and say, "Well, mama, Medicare went broke today. It went broke today because nobody had the courage to do something about it. I knew it was going broke, but I didn't want to tell anybody because I thought somebody might criticize me for trying to do something about it. So I just stood by thinking, 'Well, when it goes broke in 3 years, maybe something magical will happen, and maybe nobody will blame me.'" I am never going to make that telephone call.

I am proud to say that we took two steps in the Finance Committee this week that will go a long way. If we continue to show the courage that we showed in committee on the floor of the Senate, then I will never have to call my mother and tell her Medicare went broke, and she will never be without the benefits that she has become accustomed to and that she needs.

And let me outline the two things we did.

First of all, as my colleagues will remember, we had a crisis in Social Security in 1983. We set up a commission which was almost unable to agree on what to do about putting Social Security back in the black. We were on the verge halting Social Security checks. However, one of the reforms which arose from the process resulted from a recognition that Americans are healthier, and are living longer.

So as part of that Social Security solvency package, those of us who were in Congress at the time swallowed hard and voted to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 over a 24-year period.

I remind my colleagues that when Social Security started, the average American lifespan was less than the eligibility age for Social Security. So the Social Security system protected people who lived longer than the average.

Obviously, thank goodness, the average lifespan of Americans has grown dramatically since 1935. So we now have in law where beginning in the year 2003 through the year 2027, we are going to very gradually raise the retirement age from 65 to 67. That was part of a program to keep Social Security solvent.

It was heavy lifting at the time. Medicare was still in the black, and nobody wanted to make the lifting any heavier.

Now we are reaching a point where this phase-in for Social Security is going to start in the year 2003. So the Finance Committee, in what I believe was a courageous vote, voted to begin phasing up the eligibility age for Medicare in the same way as Social Security. That is the first significant change we made. I think there is something historic about that change which goes beyond it being the most dramatic change we have ever made in Medicare's history to keep the program solvent.

The second dramatic thing about this reform is that we did not do it to save